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ABSTRACT

Findings from a study comparing the effects of segregated versus mainstreamed preschool settings on handicapped and non-handicapped children strongly suggest that mainstreaming is the preferable alternative for all types of handicapped preschool children. Initially, handicapped children in both segregated and mainstreamed settings were found to be restless and hyperactive, defiant and aggressive. Extremely egocentric, both socially and cognitively, they were unable to give and take, adhere to the rules of the game, or play freely and successfully with their peers. They were for the most part silent, linguistically passive children with poor, often incoherent speech. Over the course of the school year, the handicapped children in the mainstreamed setting changed dramatically, becoming more like their normal peers and behaving in socially appropriate ways. The handicapped children in the segregated setting exhibited very little change over time. The behavior of the non-handicapped children in the two settings remained similar throughout the study. Individual events from children's case histories support the claim that normal peers constitute models from which the handicapped can learn. First, the normal children provided patterns of spontaneous speech in natural learning situations rather than the stilted language of formal one-to-one training programs. Second, the normal children served as role models for advanced play behavior. Finally, the normal children had a powerful reinforcing influence which enabled them to induce their handicapped classmates to engage in classroom activities where teacher efforts had failed. (JMB)

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THE ISSUE OF MAINSTREAMING: ITS EFFICACY IN THE PRESCHOOL

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Abstract

With the signing of P.L. 94-142, the issue of mainstreaming is no longer a theoretical argument but rather a practical question -- does the empirical evidence show mainstreaming to be a superior educational alternative to segregation? This paper reports findings from a study of both handicapped and non-handicapped children in segregated and mainstreamed preschool settings which strongly suggest that mainstreaming is a preferable alternative to segregated special education for all types of handicapped preschool children involved. Moreover, the non-handicapped children in the mainstreamed setting were not adversely affected by the experience. By serving as role models, these normally developing children greatly influenced the development of their handicapped classmates. Discussion of the benefits that accrued to both handicapped and non-handicapped children in the mainstreamed setting, as well as suggestions for curriculum planning, are included.

The Issue of Mainstreaming: Its Efficacy in the Preschool

Five years ago the literature in education was filled with theoretical arguments for and against mainstreaming. The integration of handicapped children into regular education was viewed on one hand as a pressing moral imperative (Dunn, 1968; Martin, 1974) or, on the other hand, as a threat to the future of all handicapped children (Smith & Arkans, 1974). But with the signing of P.L. 94-142, the theoretical battle was decided, and as such, the discussion has entered the second stage of inquiry; simply stated, the issue at hand is whether we have embarked upon the right course. Does the empirical evidence show mainstreaming to be a superior educational alternative to segregation?

Results from a recent study at the University of Virginia Child Development Center which explored the social, emotional, and linguistic growth of both handicapped and non-handicapped children in segregated and mainstreamed settings strongly suggest that mainstreaming is indeed a preferable alternative to segregated special education, at least for children aged 2-6. The study was purposely conducted with preschool children on the assumption that younger children are more willing to accept diversity

than older children (Goodman, Gottlieb & Harrison, 1972). Arguably, the long-standing policy of isolating handicapped children from society has fostered an attitude of fear and non-acceptance of handicapped children by their normally developing peers. Yet younger children who have not yet been conditioned to see difference as deviance are more accepting of handicapped children.

To compare the efficacy of mainstreaming to segregation, children in three distinct preschool settings were observed and evaluated. A segregated special education class for 15 handicapped children aged 2-6, a mainstreamed preschool for 30 2-6 year old children, one third of whom were handicapped, and a segregated private nursery school for 18 normally developing children aged 2 1/2-6 served as field sites for the study. Handicapping conditions at the first two sites ranged from mild to severe and included Down's Syndrome, brain damage, cerebral palsy, myelomeningocele, emotional disturbance and language impairment. Given the small size of the study, the lack of control over assigned groups, and the inability to establish control groups based upon reasonably matched variables, a standard experimental design for comparing children was inadvisable. Moreover, the arena of behavior which characterizes the development of handicapped and non-handicapped children far exceeds the number of possible segments of behavior that could be observed or recorded. If, in fact, one

particular set of behaviors were selected for evaluation, i.e. verbal interaction, other, perhaps equally important behaviors might not be examined. And as Cruickshank (1974) argues, there may be an infinite number of variables, all of which cannot be controlled.

Thus just as Freud and Piaget constructed elaborate and productive theories of human functioning by informally assessing numerous variables on relatively few individuals, the present investigation focuses on comparably few individuals but on many diverse variables. A statistical analysis was conducted that was appropriate for data sets in which there are relatively few individuals but many variables. The analysis used in the present study provided an empirically rigorous method of describing typologies of children that could be clinically interpreted and followed over time. The clinical interpretations emerging from the empirical results have been reported elsewhere, and although a technical description of the analysis is not appropriate here, interested readers are referred to Kaplan-Sanoff (1977) and Kaplan-Sanoff and Richards (in preparation) for a detailed explanation of the methodology and the numerical results of the investigation.

Initially, handicapped children in both segregated and mainstreamed settings were found to be very similar to one another. They were restless and hyperactive, defiant and aggressive. Extremely egocentric, both

socially and cognitively, these children were unable to give and take, adhere to the rules of the game, or play freely and successfully with their peers. They were, for the most part, silent, linguistically passive children with poor, often incoherent speech. Yet the handicapped children in the mainstreamed setting changed dramatically over the course of the school year, becoming more like their normal peers and behaving in socially appropriate ways. From fall to spring however, the behavior of the handicapped children only changed if they were in the mainstreamed setting; those handicapped children in the segregated special education setting exhibited very little change over time.

Significantly, the behavior of the non-handicapped children in both the mainstreamed and private nursery schools remained similar throughout the study, providing strong evidence that those normally developing children in the mainstreamed setting were not negatively influenced by the presence of handicapped children in their classrooms.

Implications

As these findings suggest then, there are apparent discrepancies between the school experiences of handicapped children in segregated and mainstreamed school settings. Both programs provided clearly defined instructional plans and intervention strategies, and while their theoretical orientations were quite different, research suggests that this difference is not important to the success of educating handicapped children (Valetutti, 1969). What does appear

to be the important difference between the two schools, however, was the presence of non-handicapped children in the mainstreamed setting:

> Children with severe problems are not likely to improve without specific intervention. With specific intervention, however, it appears that progress is rapid where there are normal peers to serve as role models for appropriate behavior. (Allen, Benning, & Drummond, 1972, p.139)

Handicapped children in the mainstreamed environment had access to their normally developing peers - classmates capable of helping, teaching, and modelling appropriate, more advanced behaviors, whereas handicapped children in the segregated setting had only each other's idiosyncratic, and often bizarre, behaviors to copy. In the present study, handicapped children in the mainstreamed setting shared a classroom with normally developing children ranging in age from 2-6. These non-handicapped children served as two different types of role models, demonstrating the normal school-related behavior appropriate for their chronological age and displaying the appropriate intellectual and linguistical behaviors related to their mental age. For example, Eddie, a handicapped four year old child, was able to model the socially appropriate play of his four year old peers while working on cognitive and language tasks with a group of normal two year olds whose abilities

were similar to his.

Over the course of the school year, the author observed numerous incidents supporting Wolfensberger's claim (1972) that normal peers constitute models from which the handicapped can learn. By describing some of the dynamics of these individual events in case history terms, the author hopes to make the findings of the study more meaningful, while conveying a vivid sense of the atmosphere and activity of a mainstreamed preschool. Tom, a totally self-involved and unmotivated child, was observed demanding to wear numbered football shirts like the other boys in the class. This desire to be like other, non-handicapped children was a milestone in Tom's growing awareness of himself, his surroundings, and his relationships with others. Similarly, Dan's eagerness for friendship with Eve made it possible for him to abandon his pre-occupied world of fantasy and join her in running and climbing games, games which helped develop his poor motor skills. Indeed, the non-handicapped children were often able to engage their handicapped classmates in activities that no amount of teacher attention and praise could induce. And while they were facilitating the development of their handicapped peers, the growth of the normal children was not adversely affected. Findings from the present investigation that

the behaviors of the non-handicapped children were similar, regardless of setting, provide further confirmation that the presence of handicapped children in the classroom does not hurt the development of the non-handicapped children (Matz & Ispa, 1974: Allen, et al., 1972).

In fact, the child-child interactions that occurred in the mainstreamed setting had a reciprocal quality to them, for just as handicapped children benefited from the presence of their non-handicapped peers, the handicapped children also helped their normally developing classmates. Scott, a hearing impaired 5 year old, was frequently observed reminding the normal 2 year olds to share their toys. And Lilly, whose cerebral palsy made her voice almost inaudible,taught her aggressive and highly verbal friend how to play calmly and quietly. As Klein (1975) suggested, this reciprocal relationship between children in a mainstreamed setting creates tolerance and understanding on the part of the non-handicapped children, while building motivation and social competence in those with handicaps.

Furthermore, these child-child interactions occurred spontaneously between handicapped and non-handicapped children in the mainstreamed environment. There was no structured program to develop specific interaction patterns (see Devoney, Guralnick, & Rubin, 1974), and while peer tutoring and modelling were observed, these occurred during the course of an ordinary day; they were not

deliberately arranged to increase social interactions. Thus handicapped children were not social isolates as had been predicted in the literature (Kirk, 1950), nor were they deliberately victimized as had been feared. What was apparent in the mainstreamed setting was the value placed on human differences. The staff responded to each child, whether handicapped or not, as an individual with diverse abilities and needs, and perhaps it was this attitude and model of acceptance that fostered spontaneous interactions between the children.

There were several other distinct differences in the school experiences of handicapped children in mainstreamed and segregated settings. The noise and constant chatter that characterize most preschool classrooms were absent in the segregated special education class. Children rarely spoke to each other, nor did they communicate in non-verbal gestures. The only verbalizations heard were teachers talking and the idiosyncratic sound patterns made by individual children. In the statistical analysis, language problems most clearly differentiated handicapped children from their non-handicapped peers; regardless of setting, most handicapped children in the study had moderate to severe language delays. Yet each child in the mainstreamed class made significant improvement in his/her language skills. The explanation for this improvement is suggested by Guralnick's research (1976) that non-handicapped

children are capable of acting as teachers and parents, adjusting the level and density of their language to the needs of their handicapped peers. The opportunity to interact with and listen to linguistically competent peers provided a tremendous advantage over segregation for building and sustaining language development in handicapped children.

A second distinguishing characteristic of handicapped children was their low level of cooperative peer play. These children seemed unable to attract and maintain the attention of their classmates. And while this description fit all of the handicapped children at the start of the school year, those handicapped children in the mainsteamed class changed in their play patterns from solitary, disruptive play to more advanced parallel and associative levels of play. This change in play patterns is consistent with Piaget's contention (1952) that children learn best from those whose behavior represents the next highest level of development. Significantly, the handicapped children in the segregated setting had no advanced role models to imitate; on several occasions, less impaired children were observed trying to make contact with each other, but their attempts were largely unsuccessful. The children did not know how to play together and their teachers appeared unable to facilitate their efforts to play cooperatively. On the other hand, handicapped children in the mainstreamed class had numerous examples of play to follow, ranging from the

parallel play of the normally developing two year olds to the advanced sociodramatic play of the five and six year olds. Thus, handicapped children learned from those normal children whose level of play was just one step above their own, regardless of their chronological age.

Parents often express concern that just as handicapped children imitate the behavior of their non-handicapped peers, those normally developing children might also copy the immature and socially unacceptable behavior of the handicapped children. However, there was no evidence to support that fear since the overall behaviors of the normally developing children did not change with their exposure to handicapped classmates in the mainstreamed setting. Teachers reported that while a non-handicapped child might occasionally copy the tantrums of a handicapped child, he/she would quickly realize that inappropriate behavior did not produce the desired results and the imitative behavior would stop.

Handicapped children were also distinguished by their poor quality of their relationship with their teacher: they rarely cooperated, responded negatively to suggestions, and yet required the teacher's praise and constant support to participate in most activities. Still, handicapped children in the mainstreamed class made great strides in their ability to take responsibility and to participate willingly in school activities. As suggested earlier, the normally developing children seemed able to induce their handicapped classmates to engage in activities, ie. singing, art, toileting, that no amount of teacher attention could induce. Thus, here

too mainstreaming provided an educational experience superior to segregation. What handicapped children will not do for their teachers, they will often do for their peers who function as powerful reinforcing agents.

By examining the individual children and not merely specific variables, the statistical strategies made it possible to assess each child's degree of change by comparing their progress over time. Significantly, the findings of the present study reveal that mainstreaming was a more effective educational experience not only for the moderately handicapped or borderline children in the investigation, but for the severely handicapped children as well. There did not seem to be any particular group of children for whom mainstreaming was not beneficial or for whom segregation was more successful.

While the findings from this study strongly support the educational superiority of mainstreaming for preschool children, what is most important about the findings is the insight they can give to curriculum planning for handicapped children. As previously discussed, mainstreaming represents a superior educational program in three critical areas of development -- language, cooperative peer play, and willingness to participate in activities. First, through their use of age appropriate language, normal children provided patterns of language development within the context of a natural learning situation. Rather than the stilted language of formal one-to-one training programs, the handicapped children in the mainstreamed class were exposed to the

spontaneous speech of children whose use of language was just slightly better than their own. Second, the normal children served as role models for advanced play behavior, furnishing the handicapped child with visual examples of how to play with peers towards a common goal. Third, normal children had powerful reinforcing influence over their handicapped peers. Their ability to involve the handicapped children in learning activities was an important supplement to the planned curriculum. By recognizing and drawing upon these strengths of mainstreaming, curriculum planners and teachers can begin to develop more effective programs for the handicapped. They now have an additional source to rely on -- the normally developing children in the mainstreamed class who not only provide valuable models for the handicapped children in crucial areas, but who also gain self-confidence, respect, and tolerance from sharing classes with their handicapped peers.

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